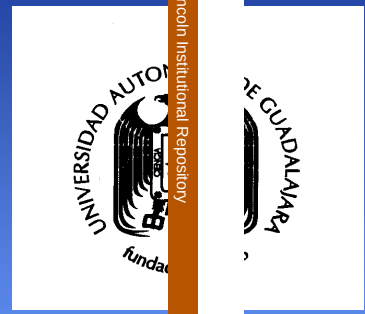
CORE
Provided by University of Lincoln Institutional Repository

Conference on
"ECTS and Assessment in Higher Education "
Umeå University, Sweden
June 7-9th, 2006



From ECTS to EGS: Strains, Pains, Brains and Gains

© Professor Terence Karran

Director, C@mpus Virtu@l
Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara
(tkarran@uag.mx)

Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.a

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

The Sorbonne Declaration

Joint Declaration on Harmonisation of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System (France, Germany, Italy, U.K.) May 1998

Comittment to "common frame of reference, aimed at improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as employability" achieved by

- **"system of two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate ... for international comparison & equivalence"**
- **"achieved through the use of credits (such as ECTS)"**
- **via "progressive harmonisation ... through strengthening of already existing experience"**

The Bologna Declaration

Joint Declaration on the European Higher Education Area signed by 29 European Education Ministers, 19th June 1999

To create a comprehensive pan-European higher education system within the first decade of the third millennium), the Bologna Declaration specified three structural requirements:

- **system of easily readable and comparable degrees through the implementation of the Diploma Supplement.**
- **system with two undergraduate and graduate cycles, with access to the graduate cycle requiring successful completion of first cycle degree, which lasts a minimum of three years is relevant to the European labour market.**
- **system of credits – to promote the most widespread student mobility and covering both higher education and other contexts.**

From Sorbonne *To* Bologna

From: European sphere of operation.

To: *Promote European h.e. world-wide.*

From: Academic benefits – best opportunities for students.

To: *Economic benefits – international competitiveness of European higher education.*

From: Via progressive harmonisation of existing strengths.

To: *Action plan and explicit policy objectives.*

From: No stated time frame for progress.

To: *Completion within 10 years and progress to be monitored.*

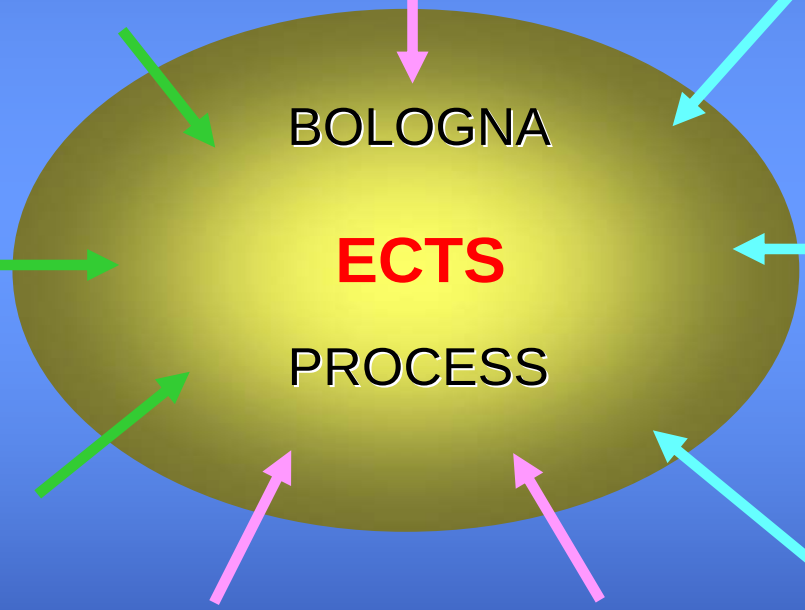
BACKGROUNDS - POSSIBILITIES - DRIVERS

ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS
WITHIN EU THROUGH JOINT AWARDS

INTERNATIONALIZATION
AND GLOBAL
MEGATRENDS

EU AND NATIONA
GOVERNMENTS

COMPETITIVENESS
VIA EDUCATION,
AND TRAINING



GROWTH IN
EUROPEAN UNION
MEMBERSHIP

STUDENTS

FREE FLOW OF
GOODS,
SERVICES AND
PEOPLE IN
THE EU

NATIONAL AND
INTERNATIONAL
COMPETITITION
UNIVERSITIES

DISTANCE LEARNING
ACROSS EU VIA NEW ICTS

NEW DEGREE POSSIBILITIES VIA
E.U. HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

Implementing the Bologna Process

as acknowledged in Bergen 2005

- *Three cycle qualifications framework adopted* **in the EHEA, (with) generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences**
- *Quality assurance systems established* **in most countries, based on the criteria in the Berlin Communiqué and with a high degree of cooperation and networking, but progress is still required as regards student involvement and international cooperation.**
- *Recognition for complementarity* **between the the EHEA qualifications framework and the proposed broader framework for qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing both general (academic) education and vocational education and training.**

Implementing the Bologna Process

as acknowledged in the Bergen Communiqué 2005

"Ministers responsible for higher education in the participating countries of the Bologna Process ... all share the common understanding of the principles, objectives and commitments of the Process as expressed in the Bologna Declaration ... confirm our commitment to coordinating our policies through the Bologna Process to establish the European Higher Education Area by 2010, and commit ourselves to assisting the new participating countries to implement the goals of the Process."

The European Higher Education Area- Achieving the Goals

The Role of ECTS

as acknowledged in the Berlin Communiqué September 2003

"the important role played by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development"

ECTS is "increasingly becoming a generalised basis for the national credit systems"

Need to encourage "further progress with the goal that the ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system"

E.C.T.S. The Key Features

- Information Package
- Transparency
- Learning Agreement
- Transcript of Records
- Course catalogue to include:
  - Information on the Institution;
  - Information on degree programmes:
    - General description;
    - Description of individual course units;
  - General information for students.

E.C.T.S. Progress

"Stage of implementation of ECTS:- The great majority of countries are implementing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in at least some programmes. In 20 countries, ECTS credits are allocated in the majority of higher education programmes, enabling credit transfer and accumulation, and in 12 countries ECTS credits are allocated in a limited number of programmes. In 9 countries, there is either a national system for credit transfer and accumulation that is compatible with ECTS, or the national credit transfer and accumulation system is being gradually integrated with ECTS."

Bologna Process Stocktaking Report, **Working Group appointed by the Bologna Follow Up Group, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005 p.38f**

E.C.T.S. Progress

"... ECTS ... is undergoing rapid and far-reaching extensions before it has been properly understood and introduced in its original form in many institutions. ... the system is still applied in a very rudimentary or haphazard fashion to student exchange and credit transfer. ... The basic elements and principles of ECTS seem simple enough, but its implementation in the highly differentiated European higher education systems is fraught with all sorts of problems"

S. Reichert, C. Tauch, (2003), *Trends 2003,* **p.66f, 70**

"ECTS is being widely used for "student transfer", and generally seems to work well. However, it is still often perceived as a tool to translate national systems into a European language, rather than as a central feature of curriculum design"

S. Reichert, C. Tauch, (2005), *Trends IV*, **p.5**

ECTS is a *SUCCESS*!!!

"The tools ECTS uses are tried and tested and have been shown to be effective. The principles on which it is based are sound"

S. Adam, (2001), *ECTS Extension Feasibility Project Report* **for the European Commission. p.19**

"More than one thousand universities have introduced ECTS in one or more departments, with Commission Socrates-Erasmus support. ... The Rectors gathered by the EUA in Zurich last year acknowledged the role of ECTS for transparency, recognition and curriculum innovation."

Viviane Reding, *Opening Address* **at the EUA Convention of European Higher Education Institutions, Graz, 29 May 2003**

OR IS IT?

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

Calculating the ECTS Ranks

All students successfully passing the assessment, are listed in order of numerical descent from the highest mark to the lowest mark. Within the list the precise grade points for the five different ECTS percentile groups from 'A' to 'E' are then established and lines drawn to indicate the dividing points between :-

'A' = the top ten percentile

'B' = the next twenty five percentile

'C' = the next thirty percentile

'D' = the next twenty five percentile

'E' = the remaining ten percentile

The ECTS Ranking System

ECTS rank	% of students achieving the rank	Definition
A	10	**Excellent** – outstanding performance with only minor errors
B	25	**Very Good** – above the average standard but with some errors
C	30	**Good** – generally sound work but with a number of notable errors
D	25	**Satisfactory** – fair but with significant shortcomings
E	10	**Sufficient** – performance meets the minimum criteria
FX		**Fail** - some more work required before the credit can be awarded
F		**Fail** - considerable further work is required

Problems Calculating ECTS Ranks

- Only students with pass grades are ranked, so the proportion of all students being ranked varies between countries
- Some courses may have very few students, especially when the course is new, which may make application of the ECTS ranks problematic
- The national grading system may be non-numeric, making it very difficult to construct the necessary statistical base to calculate the ECTS ranks.
- Some national grading systems may have insufficiently fine grained assessment scores (and therefore few grading categories), making it difficult to calculate the ranks.

Problems Using ECTS Ranks

- Most eu h.e. grading systems are criterion referenced, so students can get very high national grades but still get an average or low ECTS rank
- ECTS norm referenced ranks may it difficult to accurately transfer grades between different national grading system, especially where the number of grades is limited
- ECTS provides insufficient discrimination in the largest category of students (i.e. “good”)
- ECTS has national coherence in some states, but is applied differently by individual institutions within others, making it more akin to a lottery.

Problems Using ECTS Ranks

- Custom and practice have tended to move the perception (and use) of ECTS away from norm to criterion referencing, in an ad hoc unsystematic way
- Learning outcomes and competences are now central to the EHEA qualifications framework, but students' achievement of learning outcomes is criterion referenced while ECTS is norm referenced
- ECTS may be useful in bilateral credit trading between two universities, but for complete and easy transfer, a unified EU grading system is needed.

ECTS Ranking Example: France

ECTS rank	University 1	University 2	University 3	University 4	University 5
A	16 - 20 Très Bien	18 - 20 Excellent	> or = 14.5 Très Bien & Bien	16 ou plus Excellent	>15 Excellent
B	14 - 16 Bien	16 - 18 Très Bien	> or = 13 Bien & Assez Bien	14 Très Bien	15 - 12 Très Bien
C	12 - 14 Assez Bien	14 - 16 Bien	> or = 11.7 Assez Bien	12 Bien	12 - 10 Bien
D	10 - 12 Passable	12 - 14 Satisfaisant	> or = 11 Passable	11 Satisfaisant	10 - 8 Satisfaisant
E		08 - 12 Passable	> or = 10 Passable	10 Passable	8 - 6 Passable
FX	Inférieur à 10 Echec	00 - 08 Insuffisant	<10 Echec	8 ou 9 Insuffisant	<6 Insuffisant
F			< 6 Echec probant	7 ou moins Echec	

ECTS Ranking Examples: Greece

ECTS Rank	University 1	University 2	University 3	University 4	University 5
A	9.0 - 10: Excellent	8.6 - 10 Excellent	8.50 - 10 Excellent	8.50 - 10 Excellent	8.50 - 10 Excellent
B	8 - 8.5: Very Good	7 - 8.4 Very Good			7.0 - 8.4 Very Good
C	7 - 7.5: Good	6 - 6.9 Good	7.0 - 8.4 Very Good	6.5 - 8.4 Very Good	6 - 6.9 Good
D	6 - 6.5: Satisfactory	5.1 - 5.9 Satisfactory	5.1 - 6.9 Good	5.01 - 6.49 Good	
E	5 - 5.9: Sufficient	5 Lowest Passing Grade	5 Passing Grade	5 Passing Grade	5 Passing Grade
FX	4 - 4.5 Fail	4 - 4.9 Insufficient	0 - 4.9 Fail	0 - 4.49 Fail	0 - 4.49 Fail
F	0 - 3.5: Fail	0 - 3.9 Failure			

ECTS Ranking Examples: Netherlands

ECTS rank	University 1	University 2	University 3	University 4	University 5
A	9 - 10: Excellent	9 - 10	8.3 - 10	above 9.5	9.5 - 10
B	8.5: Very Good	8 - 9	7.3 - 8.2	between 8.5 and 9.49	8.5 - 9.4
C	8 - 7.5: Good	7 - 8	6.3 - 7.2	between 7.5 and 8.49	7.6 - 8.4
D	7 - 6.5: Satisfactory	6 - 7	5.8 - 6.2	between 6.5 and 7.49	6.6 - 7.5
E	6: Sufficient	6		between 5.5 and 6.49	5.5 - 6.5
FX	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	5	5.0 - 5.7	between 4.5 and 5.49	0 - 5.4
F		1 - 4	0.0 - 4.9	less than 4.49	

ECTS Ranking Examples: Italy

ECTS rank	University 1	University 2	University 3	University 4	University 5
A	30 - 30 Lode: Excellent	30 -30 Lode: Excellente	30 e lode Excellente	28 - 30 Cum Laude	30 - 30 e lode
B	28 - 29 Very Good	27 - 29 Molto Buono	30 Molto Buono	26 - 27	28 - 29
C	26 - 27 Good	24 - 26 Buono	27 - 29 Buono	24 - 25	25 - 27
D	24 - 25 Satisfactory	19 - 23 Soddisfacente	25 - 26 Soddisfacente	21 - 23	20 - 24
E	18 - 23 Sufficient	18 Sufficiente	18 - 24 Sufficiente	18 - 20	18 - 19
FX		14 - 17	Insufficiente		
F		0 - 13			

Problems Calculating the Ranks

Nation and Local Score	France 15/20	Greece 7.4/10	Italy 28/30	Netherlands 7.3/10
University 1: ECTS Rank	B	C	B	D
University 2: ECTS Rank	C	B	B	C
University 3: ECTS Rank	A	C	C	B
University 4: ECTS Rank	B	C	A	D
University 5: ECTS Rank	B	B	B	D
Highest Possible	A	B	A	B
Lowest Possible	C	C	C	D

A student taking four units, one each in France, Greece, Italy and Netherlands and getting 15/20, 7.4/10, 28/30 and 7.3/10 could be given ranks A,B,A,B, or ranks C,C,C,D depending on the university at which the units were taken

How did this happen?

"assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and graduates"

Brown, G., (2001), *Assessment: A Guide for Lecturers,* **(York: LTSN), p.4**

"Where near total correspondence has proved possible between a local grading scale and the ECTS grading scale, some institutions have been able to print 'straight-line' conversion tables from their local grades into ECTS grades. … institutions which discover clear and direct lines of comparison with ECTS grades are greatly encouraged to exploit this coincidence."

ECTS Guidance Notes **provided for Latvian Universities (p. 4 and ff.)**

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

A simple yet hard question:

What is the extent of the similarities and differences within the grading systems used in Universities in the 25 nations of the European Union?

National Grading Systems: Austria

Scale	Maximum	91 - 100	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
Percentage Equivalent		92 - 100	81 - 91	67 - 80		51 - 66
National Scale		1	2	3		4
Description		Sehr gut	Gut	Befriedigend		Genügend
		Very Good	*Good*	*Satisfactory*		*Sufficient*

Scale	41 - 50	31 - 40	21 - 30	11 - 20	1 - 10
Percentage Equivalent	0 - 50				
National Scale	5				
Description	Nicht genügend				
	Not Sufficient				

National Grading Systems: Estonia

Scale	Maximum	91 - 100	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
Percentage Equivalent		100 - 91	90 - 81	80 - 71	70 - 61	60 - 51
National Scale		5	4	3	2	1
Description		Suurepärane	Väga Hea	Hea	Rahuldav	Kasin
		Excellent	*Very good*	*Good*	*Satisfactory*	*Sufficient*

Scale	41 - 50	31 - 40	21 - 30	11 - 20	1 - 10
Percentage Equivalent	0 - 50				
National Scale	0				
Description	Puudulik				
	Fail				

National Grading Systems: Hungary

Scale	Maximum	91 - 100	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
Percentage Equivalent		86 - 100		71 - 85	61 - 70	51 - 60
National Scale		5		4	3	2
Description		Jeles		Jó	Közepes	Elégséges
		Best/ Excellent		*Good*	*Fair*	*Satisfactory*

Scale	41 - 50	31 - 40	21 - 30	11 - 20	1 - 10
Percentage Equivalent	0 - 50				
National Scale	1				
Description	Elégtelen				
	Unsatisfactory				

National Grading Systems: Latvia

Scale	Maximum		91 - 100	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
Percentage Equivalent	100	99	91 - 98	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
National Scale	10	9	8	7	6	5	4
Description	Izcili	Teicami	Ļoti Labi	Labi	Gandrīz Labi	Viduvēji	Gandrīz Viduvēji
	With Distinction	Excellent	Very Good	*Good*	*Almost Good*	*Satisfactory*	*Almost Satisfactory*

Scale	41 - 50	31 - 40	21 - 30	11 - 20	1 - 10
Percentage Equivalent	0 - 50				
National Scale	3		2		1
Description	Neapmierinoši		Slikti		Ļoti Slikti
	Unsatisfactory		*Bad*		*Very Bad*

National Grading Systems: Slovenia

Scale	Maximum	91 - 100	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
Percentage Equivalent		91 - 100	81 - 90	71 - 80	61 - 70	51 - 60
National Scale		10	9	8	7	6
Description		Odlicno	Prav Dobro	Prav Dobro	Dobro	Zadostno
		Excellent	*Very Good*	*Very Good*	*Good*	*Pass*

Scale	41 - 50	31 - 40	21 - 30	11 - 20	1 - 10
Percentage Equivalent	1 - 50				
National Scale	1 - 5				
Description	Nezadostno				
	Fail				

Results of Analysis

- *Criterion Referencing* - **with minor exceptions, all EU h.e. systems use criterion referencing.**
- *Numeric Grading Scales* - **universities in all EU member states, with one exception, use a numeric system of grading allied to the use of grade descriptors.**
- *No Universal System* - **there is no predominant grading system, but the most common ones are the 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) scale, used in five nations, and the 1 to 20 scale, used in another five nations.**
- *Pass and Fail Grades* - **there is no common pattern in the number of pass/fail grades awarded in each system, but it is unusual for grade scales to be symmetric about the pass mark, in most systems there are more grades above the pass grade than below it**

Results of Analysis

- *Pass Grades* - **the number of grades varies greatly - nine nations use a system with four grading categories, seven nations use a five point scale, and four nations use a six point scale.**
- *"Maximum" Grade* - **most grading systems have, at the top of their range, a category for the most excellent.**
- *"Minimum" Grade* - **at the bottom end of the scale, most systems have a minimum 'Satisfactory' or 'Sufficient' grade**
- *"Average" Grade* - **between the minimum pass and the very highest grades, all nations have grades representing 'Good' and 'Very Good', but the degree of differentiation in these grades, which will be awarded to the majority of students, varies greatly from one nation to the next .**

Results of Analysis

- *Pass Mark* - **the most common pass mark borders on the equivalent of 50 percent, i.e. between 48 and 51 percent, and used by more than half of EU nations**
- *Fail Grades* - **most systems have only one fail grade, ('Fail', 'Not Sufficient', 'Unsatisfactory', or 'Poor'), but some allow for the possibility of retrieval through deliberation, and others discriminate between various levels of failure.**
- *Recovery of Failure* - **most countries allowed at least one attempt at re-sitting failed assessments, and virtually all the different systems allowed the full re-sit mark to stand.**

Grading Systems: Common Features

- *Criterion-referenced* - **against the achievement of agreed learning outcomes**
- *Pass mark set at 5/10 or 10/20,* **above which there would be a satisfactory grade, students would have the right to at least two re-sits without penalties for re-assessment**
- *Ascending grading system* **based on a 1-10 or a 1-20 scale, with each scale category equal in size.**
- *Five or more pass grades,* **with one reserved for the very best students, but which would allow different categories among the average and good students (by far the largest groups) to be readily discerned.**

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

E.G.S. Working Group

- *Membership* - **Nine members only, one from each of the academic communities in France, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom, plus a representative from both ERIC/Naric and the EU Commission**
- *Meetings* - **two meetings only, for one day each, were held on 3th December 2005, and February 7th 2006, after which it was wound up by Peter van der Hijden, from the EU Commission, with the assumption that the work would be carried forward by the Tuning Group.**
- *Outputs* - **presentation by Robert Wagenaar "Learning Outcomes/Competences based European Grading Scale"; four page formal briefing paper produced after last meeting, but many informal discussions via email.**

Recommendations of EGSWG

- *Learning Outcomes* - **the grading scale will be used to describe students' relative achievement of learning outcomes, which demonstrate the possession (or otherwise) of specific and generic competences**
- *Pass Mark* - **must lie in the middle of the range of assessment scores - e.g. if the assessments are scored at 0-60, the pass mark will be 30**
- *Recovery of Failure* - **the number of re-sit attempts permissible will depend on national and institutional regulations, but the score (and associated grade) obtained in a re-sit will not be subject to limitations.**

Recommendations of EGSWG

- *Fail Grades* - **there should be only two fail grades - the range of assessment scores below the pass mark should be divided into two rank categories of scores only**
- *Pass Grades* - **there should be between 5-10 pass grades, each grade having the same numeric range of assessment scores in it, and established so that each grade contains whole numbers only**
- *Grade Descriptors* - **each grade must be criterion referenced and relate to the relative achievement of learning outcomes by students**
- *Subject Consistency* - **all grades must be actively used for all subjects, in a systematic fashion that relates to the achievement of learning outcomes.**

Limitations of EGSWG

- *Membership* - **only had representatives from seven states, and did not include other possible stakeholders, such as students' and employers' organisations**
- *Insufficient Deliberation* - **creation of the EGS will be a complex process, requiring more than two days deliberation. These meetings should have marked the start of the process, by defining the problem, identifying the stakeholders, planning the necessary activities, agreeing the time frame, etc.**
- *Grades and Scores* - **the WG did not agree on the two vital elements of any EGS - the range of assessment scores, or the number and description of grades**
- *Development/Implementation* - **assumption made that the Tuning Group has the expertise to both develop and implement a new system.**

Competences based European Grading Scale

Points of departure:

- Learning outcomes express a level of competence
- Learning outcomes are developed for complete study programmes and periods of study as well as individual course units or modules
- Competences are formed in various course units / modules and assessed at different stages which implies progression
- Each module / unit should be seen in its own right
- The learning outcomes of a unit normally contains some six to eight competences to be trained. This set includes both generic and subject related competences
- Competences may be developed (by the student) to a greater degree than the level required by the learning outcome

© Robert Wagenaar 2006

Response

- "Learning outcomes express a level of competence" - a learning outcome may, but need not, relate to a specific competence,
- "Learning outcomes are developed for complete study programmes and periods of study as well as individual course units or modules" - where l.o.s are developed for complete prgrams, these are holistic and not measured by aggregation of achievement of l.o.s at unit level
- Competences are formed in various course units / modules and assessed at different stages which implies progression - competences are not formed in units but result from the learning experiences of students; are the same competences assessed to demonstrate progression?

Response

- "Each module / unit should be seen in its own right" - in which case it is difficult to conceive of holistics learning outcomes for the whole programme
- "The learning outcomes of a unit normally contains some six to eight competences to be trained. This set includes both generic and subject related competences" - practices vary by department/subject - units can have as many as ten l.o.s or as few as 4. The idea that l.o.s can be trained is highly contentious, as it suggests that they are the most simplistic level rather than the compex level which charaterises the high level skills associated with higher education
- "Competences may be developed (by the student) to a greater degree than the level required by the learning outcome" - this assumes that the achievment of the learning outcome is at a set level (i.e. pass/fail) and does not have gradations of achievement.

Competences based European Grading Scale

Learning outcomes express a level of competence:

- A distinction can be made between three levels:
  - Pass or threshold
  - Desired or typical
  - Excellent or maximal

  Threshold identifies the minimum criteria for awarding credit

  Desired is what the teacher expects from a typical student

  Excellence identifies a maximal level of competence which is (far) above expectation

© Robert Wagenaar 2006

Response

- "Pass or threshold - threshold identifies the minimum criteria for awarding credit" - some would argue that l.o.s are categoric variables, which can only be achieved or failed, in which case threshold is singular and not minimal
- "Desired or typical - desired is what the teacher expects from a typical student" - there is a difference between "expects" and "desires", surely teachers desire that all their students excel? How is a "typical student" defined - in terms of the modal assessment score? In which case this is norm and not criterion referencing.
- "Excellent or maximal - a level of competence which is far above expectation" - what is expectation? Is this the same as typical? How far above expectation is maximal?

Competences based European Grading Scale

There has been no preparatory work by the Tuning Group to support these proposals. In fact the only previous mention of such a three tier system can be found in the Tuning Phase I Report on page 146, where the Geology Subject Area Group states:

The Group considers it necessary to develop a scheme that should enable comparison of the significance of grades (not the standardization) in individual European countries. It is felt that in general three levels of performance should be recognized:

—Threshold is the minimum performance required to gain a Cycle 1 degree.

—Typical is the performance expected of students.

—Excellent is the performance expected of the top 10 % of students.

The Tuning II Report

In practice two types of learning outcomes are used: so-called threshold learning outcomes, which determine the pass level, and so-called desired learning outcomes. Desired learning outcomes express what the teaching staff expects from the typical learner in terms of the levels of competences to be obtained. Tuning has a preference for the concept of desired learning outcomes, because – at least at present – it seems to fit better in the teaching and learning culture of the vast majority of European countries

J. Gonzalez, R. Wagenaar, (2005), *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, The European Commission, p.160

Response

- "two types of learning outcomes are used: so-called threshold learning outcomes, which determine the pass level, and so-called desired learning outcomes. Desired learning outcomes express what the teaching staff expects from the typical learner in terms of the levels of competences to be obtained" - this suggests two different types of learning outcomes, rather than three levels.
- "Tuning has a preference for the concept of desired learning outcomes, because – at least at present – it seems to fit better in the teaching and learning culture of the vast majority of European countries" There is no mention of how all the people within the Tuning project were consulted to enable this preference to be identified, and no empirical evidence whatsoever given for this sweeping and most contentious statement about the teaching and learning culture in Europe

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

Grading Systems – The stakeholders

Any grading system must address the needs of a hierarchy of stakeholders and potentials users, including:

- **Students, seeking credits for academic advancement**
- **Teaching staff, assessing the impact of their efforts**
- **Universities, ensuring quality standards are met**
- **Employers, seeking to recruit qualified staff**
- **Governments pursuing national policy objectives**
- **The EU, trying to create the European H.E. Area**

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

Why Do We Need EGS?

- Educational credits are the currency of the educational market place and the global knowledge economy
- Systems of credit transfer (like ECTS) define the rate of exchange of this new global educational currency.
- To attract students, universities must offer qualifications that are recognized by other universities and employers
- Universities unable to recognise credits cannot recruit post-graduate students from other h.e. institutions that provide accredited academic qualifications or from professional associations and organisations that certificate vocational practice and experience
- Failure of universities to align their credit systems, limits the possibility of building alliances in the global borderless education market with other universities, and major knowledge - centred corporate players

Why Do We Need EGS?

HESA subject area	First	2.1	2.2	Third/Pass
Mathematical Sciences	22.0	32.8	29.3	16.0
Engineering & Technology	14.5	36.0	34.2	15.3
Physical Sciences	13.3	40.0	35.2	11.5
Computer Science	10.8	35.8	38.7	14.7
Languages	9.5	57.6	29.3	3.5
Allied to Medicine	9.5	49.7	35.1	5.7
Creative Arts & Design	9.5	47.3	35.7	7.5
Biological Sciences	8.9	50.2	34.6	6.3
Humanities	8.7	59.7	28.9	2.7
Architecture etc.	7.6	41.7	39.9	10.7
Agriculture etc.	7.0	43.7	40.4	8.9
Education	6.1	46.0	41.3	6.6
Social, Economic & Political Studies	5.9	48.6	39.4	6.1
Librarianship & Information Science	5.3	51.4	38.8	4.6
Business & Administrative Studies	4.8	42.1	43.5	9.6
Law	4.1	47.9	41.5	6.4
Combined	9.1	47.4	36.5	7.0

Source: HESA (2001).

E.G.S – The Requirements

- criterion referenced and based on the relative achievement of learning outcomes
- be sufficiently distinct from existing national systems, so as to ensure implementation as a new system, rather than as an “add on” through a translation of existing systems
- be applicable to all kinds of assessments (oral, written, group, time constrained, etc.) across a wide range of academic disciplines, at undergraduate, master’s and doctorate levels
- be able to reflect levels of both theoretical and applied knowledge and both subject specific and generic skills and abilities
- apply uniform pass/fail benchmarks to enable progression;

E.G.S – The Requirements

- enable identification of excellence, permitting entry to higher degrees;
- allow students to monitor their learning progress;
- accurately monitor the impact of teaching;
- provide a differentiated ranking of grades to reflect a range of different abilities against agreed standards of knowledge and competence;
- encourage students to strive for excellence – all grades must be achievable;
- enable retrieval of failure without diminution of the grade obtained in the re-sit;
- be universally applicable across a range of disciplines and nations, in an easy, transparent, and equitable fashion.

From ECTS to EGS

- *PARENTAGE:* How did the ECTS come about?
- *PROGRESS:* How well has the implementation of the Bologna Process and ECTS gone?
- *PROBLEMS:* What are the problems with ECTS?
- *PECULIARITIES:* EU Variations in h.e. grading systems
- *PROTOTYPES:* The European Grading System Working Group and the Tuning suggestions.
- *PLAYERS:* Who are the EGS Stakeholders?
- *PRINCIPLES:* What could/should the EGS do?
- *PRAGMATICS:* What is the best way to proceed?

ECTS: A Possible Way Forward?

- Create five Regional Project Teams, each with academic, student, and employer representatives from 5 EU states
- Organise parallel meetings of the five Regional Project Teams to discuss the success/failure of national grading schemes in meeting the needs of major stakeholders
- Organise a colloquium in Brussels, for the Regional Project Teams to present their findings, run three parallel workshops for each stakeholder group and produce an interim report of findings
- Establish a EGS Development Group, with 4-5 people nominated by each of the five regional project teams
- Produce draft recommendations for the EGS, disseminated via the Regional Project Teams

ECTS: A Possible Way Forward?

- Hold EGS workshops for each of the five Regional Project Teams to gather feedback on proposals
- Work with NARIC network and ECTS National Co-Ordinators to identify universities and courses to test the EGS
- Pilot test the EGS alongside the national grading system and the ECTS. Produce pilot project report and disseminate findings
- Organise a colloquium in Brussels, to disseminate and review the findings of the pilot project, and make changes, to the EGS
- EGS Development Group produce definitive documentation for the EGS, and start to consider time frame for its implementation

ECTS: A Possible Way Forward?

Set up European Grading System Discussion Group to share and debate ideas, develop best practice and put together project proposals.

So, if you wish to be involved in the Discussion Group, please contact myself (tkarran@uag.mx) or Dr Kent Löfgren (kent.lofgren@edmeas.umu.se) by email

“Using PowerPoint is like having a loaded AK-47 on the table: you can do very bad things with it”

Peter Norvig, Creator of the Powerpoint *Gettysburg Address*

“Finish early. Your audience will be amazed, thrilled, delighted, and thankful. ”

Edward Tufte, Professor Emeritus, Yale University

Conference on
"ECTS and Assessment in Higher Education "
Umeå University, Sweden
June 7-9th, 2006

Thank you for listening!
If you would like a copy of this presentation, or the articles on ECTS and EGS, then contact me by email: tkarran@uag.mx

(Please note that the cartoons used have been adapted especially for this presentation from copyrighted originals created by Glen Baxter, and should therefore not be passed on into the public domain)